

# In new arts center, Duxbury realizes a dream



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM LANDERS

Tom Scanlan (left) takes a guitar lesson from Mark Campbell in one of the new rooms at the the Ellison Center for the Arts, which is owned by the South Shore Conservatory and operated in cooperation with the Duxbury Art Association.

By Judith Montminy  
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**D**UXBURY — Ten years after they first talked about building their own space in Duxbury, director James Simpson and the Hingham-based South Shore Conservatory trustees have finally seen their wish come true.

The Ellison Center for the Arts, located in a converted church near the Duxbury town library and public school complex, opened for business last month when it started hosting conservatory music classes. The center, a project of the South Shore Conservatory trustees, is owned by the trustees and operated in cooperation with the Duxbury Art Association.

The arrangement is unique and continues to evolve, according to Simpson.

"It isn't a rental tenant setting," he said. "We really are together in the Ellison Center for the Arts," with the conservatory bearing most of the financial commitment.

Next Sunday the two arts groups  
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The Ellison Center for the Arts is located in a converted church on St. George Street in Duxbury.

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are inviting the public to the center for an open house with tours, sample music classes, art demonstrations, an art exhibit by faculty members and a concert by West Coast pianist Tom Hansen, formerly of Duxbury.

Simpson points to the fact that none of the \$2.5 million raised for the project so far has come from government funds. The \$2.9 million project is being financed by contributions from businesses, foundations and private citizens. More than 50 businesses in the area sport Ellison Center banners indicating they have donated from \$1,500 to \$7,500 each.

The Ellison Foundation, named for a prominent Duxbury family, is the largest donor with a contribution of \$700,000. Other contributions range from \$25,000 for an individual studio to \$100,000 for a painting studio. The rooms carry plaques that take note of the families who made the donations.

The second-floor exhibition area has been named the Bobbie Cutler Gallery in memory of the wife of John Cutler, publisher of the Duxbury Clipper. He donated \$75,000. Roberta Cutler, known throughout town as Bobbie, is credited with starting the Clipper, the town's oldest newspaper. She died two years ago.

"I wanted a memorial just for her," Cutler said of his wife, who won prizes for her painted trays and enjoyed a variety of artistic activities, including painting and acting. "Like the Helen Bumpus Gallery [at the Duxbury Free Library], this is the Bobbie Cutler Gallery. I like that. . . . She had an artist's soul."

Gallery curator Craig Bloodgood said he plans to have an exhibition of Cutler's artwork. His first exhibition at the new Ellison Center will feature work by facul-



Peter Collins Band will perform in the center's performance hall (above) at Sunday's open house.

ty members. Shows based on unusual themes to attract participation by a variety of artists are also in the planning stages. "In Your Face," an exhibit of self-portraits, another show with dance as the central theme, and a photography show are slated for later this year. Bloodgood also hopes to bring in artists who do "funky stuff." Although he is limited to using only wall space since the gallery area is part of a hallway between classes and offices, he said, "In some ways it's nice that it's not behind a closed door."

A separate gallery room was considered during the early stages of planning, when the Helen Bumpus Gallery was to be part of the arts center coalition. After the



**Painters finish work on the hallway at the center where exhibits, classes and concerts will be held.**

Bumpus gallery directors and the conservatory could not come to terms on an arrangement satisfactory to both sides, the Bumpus pulled out of the project.

Another stumbling block included objections from the center's immediate neighbors. That situation eventually was resolved.

"It's been with the Duxbury Art Association's cooperation that we have been really able to pull this off," Simpson said.

A feasibility study in 1987 showed the conservatory was not ready for its own campus in Duxbury.

"We weren't particularly well known," Simpson said. "We had been in Duxbury since 1980, certainly the Dux-

bury Art Association had been around a lot longer. They had a large volunteer group, but they had not done as much with their educational unit as we had done. . . . We have set a model for them in their educational component, and the Duxbury Art Association has been well recognized as a community resource in Duxbury for 80 years. We have not been there for 80 years. What better way to serve the community than do things together?"

Simpson said both groups see the Ellison Center for the Arts as a community resource for the arts.

"Its first mission is to serve the educational needs of the institutions that put it forward and allow those institutions to grow and become stronger and become resources for the community," he said. "Right now, we're staying very close to make sure everything that happens in the building serves the educational institutions and the immediate community of Duxbury and the surrounding communities, and the umbrella of arts and education."

With the wiring of eight studios and the multipurpose room, the conservatory is likely to start offering classes in music production as early as next fall. The facility will enable students and faculty to make professional quality recordings and give students a head start in the field of music engineering.

Another likely area of expansion includes a closer association with local school systems.

This spring, conservatory bassoon teacher Janet Underhill, through the American Composers Forum, will work with select music students at Duxbury High School. Their improvisational work will be featured in a June concert at the Ellison Center for the Arts.

Of the opening of the Ellison Center for the Arts, Simpson said, "It really was a dream."